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Centennial Challenges FAQ

Q: So, what *is* Centennial Challenges?

Centennial Challenges is a NASA program that directly engages the public through competitions to develop advanced technology and solutions that are of value to NASA's missions and to the aerospace community. The competitions award prize money to the individuals or teams that achieve the specified technology challenge goals.

Q: Where did the name come from?

The name was inspired by the centennial anniversary of the Wright Brothers' first successful flight in 1903. The Wright Brothers were pioneering inventors who pursued their ideas to fruition, which is the spirit behind the Centennial Challenges.

Q: When did the competitions start?

The program began in 2005. The first two competitions announced were Power Beam and Strong Tether. Visit <http://go.usa.gov/YwtP> for information on past competitions.

Q: How many competitions have there been?

There have been eight challenge categories, and some of these have been rerun when a win did not occur in the first run of the challenge, resulting in more than 20 challenge events to date.

Q: How much money has been awarded?

To date, more than \$6 million in prize money has been awarded to more than 15 different teams.

Q: What is the average dollar amount spent by teams in development?

That is up to each team to decide. Teams spend as little or as much as they can afford and wish to. Many teams opt to modify components/equipment they already own to reduce costs; others spend from their personal funds or seek out sponsorships to fund their entry. The largest cost is typically the team members' labor, which is often donated to the cause.

Q: What does NASA do with the winning technology?

While the team retains all rights to their technology, NASA has the option to negotiate access the technology after the competition. NASA also communicates to the public and commercial sectors the technology that has been developed, allowing other private and public organizations to seek access to the technology from the team.

Q: What if no one wins? How is that possible?

To win a challenge, teams must fully complete/meet the standards and goals set forth for each challenge. The competitions are not run as "best in show" events; rather, there are predetermined criteria for a win. Thus, if no team successfully meets the criteria, there will be no winner and the competition may be run again with the prize money still available. It is also possible that more than one team is able to meet the goals, and in that case the prize money is shared. Often there are stages of prize money given for completing various levels of the event in addition to the grand prize.

Q: How does NASA decide what the next challenge will be?

NASA has collected many ideas from private and public companies, from other government agencies, private individuals and internal NASA organizations. Ideas are periodically analyzed for applicability to the NASA mission, solver community size, anticipated prize purse required and other factors. If an idea comes through the filters and is considered a viable challenge, NASA begins the process of finding an organization to conduct the competition for the Centennial Challenges Program. The allied organization is selected from a pool that responds to a request for proposals listed in the Federal Business Opportunities.

Q: How long do teams have to work on entries from the registration to competition day?

It depends on how the allied organization sets up the competition. Some challenges are head-to-head, with competition occurring all at once over a scheduled multi-day period, or it may be first-to-demonstrate, and the first team to meet the criteria to win receives the prize purse.

Q: Who makes the rules?

The allied organization assembles a technical committee to decide how the competition will be conducted and what the rules are. Public comment on the rules is typically sought.

Q: Who judges the competitions?

Judges are subject matter experts selected by the allied organization. They must have no affiliation, financial or otherwise, to the teams or the allied organization.

Q: What happens to the winners after the competition?

Challenge winners (and many of the other participants) often go on to successful endeavors based upon or inspired by their challenge entries. Many past competitors have launched companies, hired staffs and continued to pursue commercialization of their technologies.

Q: How many times will NASA (re)run a competition?

NASA signs a Space Act Agreement with the allied organization for a two- to five-year period allowing it to conduct the challenge as needed during that time frame to advance the technology. If necessary the option to extend a Space Act Agreement is possible.

Q: Who is eligible to compete?

Individual U.S. citizens and teams of U.S. individuals may compete and win prize money. Foreign national students may compete on a team as long as they are

registered as full-time students. Foreign nationals may compete in a challenge as an individual or as a team but they will not be eligible to win prize money. [Our detailed criteria should be used.]

Q: Where can I find out more information and keep up with current competitions?

There are many ways to learn about challenges and get up-to-date postings:

- **Home page:** www.nasa.gov/challenges is where you can find information about the program in general and individual challenges. Photo galleries, media links, press information and background info are also available here.
- **Facebook:** www.facebook.com/nasacc is the official Facebook home for the challenges. Here, you'll find current updates, photo galleries, video links and a place to interact with the program.
- **Twitter:** @NASAprize is the Twitter handle for the program. Live updates during events, links, photos and progress updates can be found here.

You can also follow the NASA and Marshall Space Flight Center Twitter accounts, which post challenge updates and announcements, too. Their account handles are @NASA and @NASA_Marshall.

Q: Whom should I contact if I have questions, suggestions, etc.?

For information regarding a specific challenge, contact the allied organization listed at the challenge website www.nasa.gov/challenges.

For information regarding the Centennial Challenges Program, contact Sam Ortega, Program Manager, at 256-544-9294 or sam.ortega@nasa.gov.